

On the 3rd February 1943, following a mid-afternoon flight briefing, our aircraft Stirling BK/604 with its crew of eight left its base, Newmarket, England, and headed on course on a bombing mission to Germany. The target was Hamburg and take-off time around 6.30 p.m.

The mission was a full scale Bomber Command operation involving several hundred aircraft.

At briefing we were advised weather conditions would be severe, heavy turbulence, continuous rain and possible icing conditions almost to the target area.

And so it proved to be. As our aircraft continued on its course towards the target, I maintained a listening watch on radio, always aware there could be a sudden cancellation of the mission with a recall to base. Though no such thing happened I was aware of the intended return to base of many aircraft unable to make headway because of the severe weather conditions. Unhappily for us (and for many other aircraft too), we did not experience this problem and BK/604 continued its climb towards its bombing height of, from my memory, approximately 17,000 feet.

At a height of approximately 12,000 feet we suddenly flew out of the turbulence we had experienced thus far and settled down on the last leg of our run in to the target, some 20 - 30 minutes flying time distant.

Within a very short time of breaking into clear weather, (in actual fact it seemed only minutes) our aircraft was suddenly attacked by a German fighter. So severe was the attack, and then the second one, our aircraft soon became a mass of flames and it seemed totally out of control. My memory of this is of screaming engines, the plane diving earthwards with physical movement being impossible because of the centrifugal force being applied during the aircraft's plunge earthwards. You can understand I truly believed the end of my days had come.

Events which followed are somewhat hazy in my memory, suffering from smoke inhalation I was dimly aware of a sudden lessening of pressures and an urgent order from the aircraft captain to bale out, it was an every man for himself situation. Unable to see for the smoke, I located and affixed my parachute and groped my way to the front escape hatch, and jumped. I was hazily aware of my parachute opening with a hell of a bang (I had no recollection of ever pulling the ripcord) and soon after hitting the ground very heavily. (I later ascertained from the navigator that bale-out height was less than 1,000 feet which would account perhaps for some crew members parachutes not opening in time).

Events which followed included my being arrested in a farm-house by the Germans, being held overnight, I believe it was in Borne, and then ultimately being transferred to Queen Wilhelmina Hospital in Amsterdam to recover from leg injuries received as a result of parachuting.

Subsequent dates are not clear - I do recall spending my 21st birthday in solitary confinement in Dulag Luft, Frankfurt. That was March 2nd 1943.

Later I and some fifty or so other airmen were transferred to Stalag VIII B Lamsdorf in Silesia where we remained until early January 1945. At this time the whole camp strength, in excess of 10,000 prisoners of war were taken by the Gestapo on what was to become known as the Death March, because of the number of P.O.W.'s who died during that time. This march was to last many weeks, in the most appalling weather conditions, with little or no food and many of us suffering most debilitating illnesses, such as dysentery, malnutrition, pneumonia, pleurisy and many others.

For myself I was perhaps a little fortunate in that suffering seriously from dysentery, pneumonia and malnutrition I was admitted more dead than alive, to a hospital in Germany, its whereabouts I know not. I remained there until rescued by the American Army and was returned to England in early April where I remained hospitalised until September before finally returning to New Zealand in November 1945.

Memories I have of Borne include the kindness extended to me by local people and the assistance given to me in Amsterdam by a member of the Nederlands Red Cross a SETTY or JETTY VAN BLANKEN of DELFT, HOLLAND.

This person was able and kind enough to send a message to my parents. A copy of this message is attached.

BASE	-	NEWMARKET
BRIEFING TIME	-	3.00 P.M. - 3.30 P.M.
DEPARTURE TIME	-	5.30 P.M.
DATE	-	3/2/43
AIRCRAFT	-	STIRLING BK/604
TARGET	-	HAMBURG - GERMANY
COURSE	-	EAST-SOUTH EAST TO HOLLAND THEN NORTH/NORTH EAST TO HAMBURG
VISIBILITY - WEATHER	-	NIL CONDITIONS STORMY
BOMB LOAD	-	MIX OF INCENDIARY AND HIGH EXPLOSIVE BOMBS
FIGHTER ATTACK	-	APPROXIMATELY 8.00 P.M.
HEIGHT	-	12,000 FEET (APPROX)
BALE OUT HEIGHT	-	700 FEET (APPROX)
CREW	-	EIGHT (8) PERSONS - PILOT, CO-PILOT, NAVIGATOR, WIRELESS OPERATION - AIRGUNNER (MYSELF), ENGINEER, MID- UPPER TURRET GUNNER, BOMBaimer - FRONT GUNNER, AND REAR GUNNER.
KILLED	-	PILOT, BOMBaimer - FRONT GUNNER, ENGINEER AND REAR GUNNER.
PRISONERS OF WAR	-	CO-PILOT, NAVIGATOR - WIRELESS OPERATOR - AIRGUNNER and MID-UPPER GUNNER.
